



FOR RELEASE: **September 30, 2026**

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ARCHITECTS ANNOUNCE NINE (9) AWARD-WINNING PROJECTS

A diverse group of projects have been recognized for Excellence in Architectural Design by the Kentucky Society of Architects (AIA Kentucky), a chapter of The American Institute of Architects. Awards presented and their recipients are:

HONOR AWARD – New Construction: less than \$10M

Louisville Free Public Library - Portland Branch – Louisville, KY

Architect of Record: JRA Architects

Owner: Louisville Free Public Library

Jury Comments:

“The designers have created a civic architectural arrangement that is clearly inspired by and respectful of the historic Carnegie Library and yet is unapologetic in its own contemporary expression. The sweeping curvilinear gesture of the addition is unexpected yet thoughtfully engaged with the original building and rooted in the site. Seamless plan connections, sectional relationships, and sinuous massing forms are carefully set back so as not to detract from the primary structure. The daylighting strategies are understated yet highly effective. The offset building forms cleverly vary the scale, add variation in volume, and flood the space with natural light. This design gives its community new, accessible experiences while allowing the historic composition to remain intact; a thoughtful and commendable juxtaposition of new and old. The jury applauds the careful design and execution of this important civic resource and its continued service to its community.”

HONOR AWARD – New Construction: less than \$10M

Rivercrest Residence – Prospect, KY

Architect of Record: de Leon & Primmer Architecture Workshop

Owner: Private Residence

Jury Comments:

“This project demonstrates an exceptional resolution of conventional and non-conventional domestic program arranged in a simple, elegant formal language that rests quietly within its pastoral context. Themes of layering, boundaries, and edges are woven together both architecturally and experientially through a

shared language of form, materiality, and detailing. The residence's footprint and program are skillfully concealed through an intentional massing strategy that steps from its smallest scale at the entry to its largest at the rear, responding thoughtfully to the program's demand for larger spaces. This progression in plan and massing creates powerful spatial transitions, well-scaled negative spaces, and increased opportunities for natural light and view corridors to the surrounding landscape. The result is a cohesive project that balances programmatic demands with a refined and highly considered architectural experience. This project is an example of residential architecture that should be aspired to."

MERIT AWARD – Additions/Renovations/Restoration: less than \$10M

NKU University Center Renovation – Highland Heights, KY

Architect of Record: Omni Architects

Owner: Northern Kentucky University

Jury Comments:

"Successfully embracing a Brutalist building is no simple endeavor. This design demonstrates how a series of well-crafted and strategic interventions can elevate the experience of a building without trying to camouflage the character of the existing architecture. The iterative studies and reinterpretation of the university logo demonstrate a rigorous commitment to design. Color is skillfully employed as a wayfinding device, guiding users through the primary spaces both horizontally and vertically through a series of technically complex surgical interventions.

Geometric counterpoints to the original rigid structure are handled with sensitivity and restraint, allowing the new elements to feel contemporary and thoughtfully integrated. The additions complement the existing architecture without diminishing its character, significance, or original intent. This was one of the stronger examples of making significant improvement through relatively modest interventions."

MERIT AWARD – New Construction: greater than \$10M and less than \$50M

Clyde May's Distillery – Troy, AL

Architect of Record: Luckett & Farley

Owner: Conecuh Brands

Jury Comments:

"Careful siting and well-considered material selections elevate the project beyond its construction type. This design is a delightful arrangement of agrarian-inspired volumes that demonstrate mature restraint in selection of materials and expressive moments. The spatial experience integrates seamlessly with the existing landscape while creating new interstitial exterior moments of equal quality and overall strong organizational clarity. At a glance, the structures appear long established within Alabama's pastoral landscape, their scale and arrangement convincingly echoing traditional multi-structure farmsteads. Building relationships, scale, and material choices contribute to a convincing sense of place. The project is a great example of how very modest materials and structural systems can be elevated to highly accomplished design."

MERIT – Small Project Award: less than \$2M

Centennial Commons Pavilion – Royal Oak, MI

Architect of Record: de Leon & Primmer Architecture Workshop

Owner: The City of Royal Oak, MI

Jury Comments:

“From concept through execution, the project demonstrates a consistent commitment to enlivening a public space through contextual analysis, careful detailing, material craft, and color selection. These playful shade structures come together to form a delightful civil experience, transforming a rather mundane library entrance into a layered threshold experience that successfully connects the library with its new Centennial Park neighbor. Thoughtful solar analysis informs the design, evoking the experiential quality of shade beneath a tree without obvious mimicry. The pavilion demonstrates a high level of material detailing, craftsmanship and execution.

MERIT – Small Project Award: less than \$2M

Birdsong Brackenridge – San Antonio, TX

Architect of Record: de Leon & Primmer Architecture Workshop

Owner: Birdsong Brackenridge

Jury Comments:

“The project is a strong example of architectural sculpture grounded in thoughtful scale and functional clarity. Rarely does such a small architectural composition create such a huge impact. This project is well researched, masterfully illustrated, and artfully constructed. The result is a new architectural folly that is not only delightful to look at but also does good with clear intention. It is both sculptural and organic, while remaining carefully controlled to deliver a necessary manmade habitat that is "nested" into the landscape. The project demonstrates exceptional craftsmanship and material execution and, while small in scale, the project achieves a strong architectural presence as a contributing natural element.”

CITATION – New Construction: less than \$10M and 2026 People’s Choice Winner*

Eminence Gymnasium – Eminence, KY

Architect of Record: Studio Kremer Architects

Owner: Eminence Independent Schools

Jury Comments:

“The Eminence Gymnasium is a remarkable addition to its community that offers identity and pride to a rural school of 900 students. The project makes effective use of a modest budget and demonstrates careful design discipline. Vaulted spaces with clearly articulated edges are washed with natural light, creating a sense of openness and volume. This monumentality is balanced at the street level through carefully stepped massing and a thoughtful use of materials that define arrival, entry, and human-scaled experience. The designers’ use of modest materials, simple forms, and well-arranged spaces permits an inwardly focused athletics program to also embrace the street with a welcoming experience. Kudos to the community for investing in such a well-designed building that will serve the school system for several decades to come.”

CITATION – Small Project Award: less than \$2M

The Gaffney House – Louisville, KY

Architect of Record: Work Architecture

Owner: Galen Weiss

Jury Comments:

“The original structure is a compelling architectural work best preserved through careful stewardship, as demonstrated in this commendable historic renovation. The project reinforces the principle that less is in fact more allowing the integrity and presence of the original building to remain paramount. The well-crafted outcome celebrates the highly detailed and whimsical character of the initial design, preserving the joyfully

eclectic vision of its original architect for generations to come. The collaboration with the Army Corps of Engineers, Louisville MSD, and the City of Louisville to address flooding issues and a difficult site is commendable.”

SPECIAL STUDENT PROJECT AWARD – Unbuilt Work

Domestic Violence Recovery Center – Lexington, KY

Architect of Record: Daniela Boger, AIA

Owner: N/A

Jury Comments:

“This is a strong student submission that thoughtfully integrates architecture, graphics, and data to create spaces that serve people in need with dignity and care. Though unbuilt, it shows a commendable degree of rigor to site planning, spatial configuration, and contextual presence. Greater emphasis on how the architecture can shape healing, recovery, and daily experience would elevate the proposal beyond a strong research project. However, the project is worthy of recognition and sets a high standard for student work, demonstrating the design rigor, communication skills, and architectural thinking that form the foundation of exceptional professional practice. This award also commends the university for encouraging students to embrace socially relevant challenges with comprehensively considered design studies and well-illustrated resolutions.”

THE JURY

The Raleigh, NC area-based jurors convened on June 22 and reviewed the 37 entries received for this year's program. The jury members were:

Robby Johnston, FAIA (*Jury Co-Chair*)

Robby Johnston is co-founder of The Raleigh Architecture Company and The Raleigh Construction Company, where architecture, craftsmanship, and construction are integrated as a single practice. A North Carolina native, he earned both his Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Architecture degrees from University of North Carolina at Charlotte, graduating with distinction and receiving honors for Best Architectural Thesis Project.

Johnston’s work is rooted in the belief that architecture is most meaningful when ideas move seamlessly from concept to construction. Across residential, multifamily, and commercial projects, he focuses on transforming overlooked sites into enduring places where form, context, and function are thoughtfully aligned.

Before co-founding RACo and RCCo with Craig Kerins, Johnston worked with Kersting Architecture, Tonic Design and Construction, and Clearscapes Art + Architecture, experiences that shaped his commitment to interdisciplinary practice and the realities of building. His work has earned more than 80 design awards, including over 45 American Institute of Architects awards, multiple COTE distinctions, and LEED-certified project recognition. In 2021, the firm was invited to exhibit South Forty at the Venice Biennale.

A licensed architect in North and South Carolina, Johnston remains active in the profession as a juror, lecturer, critic, and advocate for design excellence across the region.

Craig Kerins, AIA *(Jury Co-Chair)*

Craig Kerins, AIA is co-founder of The Raleigh Architecture Company and The Raleigh Construction Company, where architecture, craftsmanship, and construction operate as a fully integrated practice. He earned both his Bachelor of Arts in Architecture and Bachelor of Architecture from University of North Carolina at Charlotte, graduating with distinction and receiving honors including the AIA Alpha Rho Chi Bronze Medal and Thesis Award for Best Design Representation. In 2012, he co-founded both firms alongside longtime collaborator Robby Johnston.

As an architect and craftsman, Kerins brings deep technical expertise in materials, building systems, and construction sequencing, shaping a design-build approach rooted in modern design principles and exceptional attention to craft. Early career experience in Austin, Texas strengthened his hands-on understanding of custom residential construction, which continues to inform his creative practice today.

Licensed as an architect in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas, and as a General Contractor in North Carolina, Kerins has earned numerous regional and state design awards through his work. In 2021, Venice Biennale invited his firm to exhibit in South Forty alongside leading Southern design practitioners. He also serves as a visiting critic and lecturer at North Carolina State University and UNC Charlotte.

Kenneth Luker, FAIA

Kenneth Luker is co-founder of Studio Archibene, an architecture and design firm committed to doing good for humanity through the practice of architecture. Based in Durham, North Carolina, Studio Archibene designs projects that strengthen communities, enhance human vitality, and inspire us all to believe in a better tomorrow. Kenneth's 30-year design career has focused primarily on planning and design for cultural, institutional, and civic projects across North America.

Kenneth did his undergraduate studies at Texas A&M University and graduate studies at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design and the University of Cambridge, England. He is a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and was the 2019 recipient of the Kamphoefner Prize from the American Institute of Architects North Carolina Chapter. In addition to practice, Kenneth is active at the NC State College of Design where he serves on the Leaders' Council and occasionally teaches studios.

Emily McCoy, FASLA

Emily McCoy, PLA, FASLA, SITES AP, is a landscape architect, ecologist, educator, and design leader whose work bridges science, culture, and community. As a Principal with Design Workshop and Associate Professor of Practice at NC State University, she has built a career around translating ecological knowledge into meaningful human experiences through design. Her nationally recognized projects range from the living learning landscapes of Thaden School to the large-scale ecological systems of the U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters and community-centered place keeping initiatives in Raleigh's historic African American neighborhoods. Emily is widely recognized for advancing evidence-based design, landscape performance, and adaptive stewardship within practice. She brings to the jury a perspective shaped equally by research, teaching, and the belief that great design emerges through curiosity, collaboration, and a deep understanding of place.

Vershaé Hite, AIA

Vershaé Hite is a Senior Architect and Project Manager at EVOKE Studio Architecture whose academic and professional experiences across the United States, China, Israel, Palestine, India, and the United Kingdom have shaped her thoughtful perspective on the relationship between design and the human condition. With more than 15 years of experience, she has contributed to impactful cultural and institutional projects including the National Museum of African American History and Culture, Motown Museum Renovation and Expansion, the Emily Krzyzewski Center, the Henrietta Lacks Building at Johns Hopkins University, and the Mary Lou Williams Center for Black Culture at Duke University. Her design philosophy centers on the intersection of culture, community, and art, informed by a framework developed during graduate studies in London.

Beyond practice, Vershaé is deeply committed to advancing equity and opportunity within architecture. Through leadership roles as former President and Past President of National Organization of Minority Architects North Carolina, she has championed scholarships, mentorship, and initiatives supporting BIPOC students and professionals. She has also served in leadership roles with AIA Triangle, the Raleigh Historic Development Commission, Raleigh Public Art and Design Board, and as VP of AIA North Carolina Build Better By Design, advocating for stronger communities through design and legislative engagement.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Kelly E. Ives, AIA, CAE, Executive Vice President for AIA Kentucky, at (859) 223-8201 or kives@aiaky.org. High quality **DIGITAL COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS** of winning projects available upon request.

FIRM CONTACTS:

JRA Architects—Colin Drake, FAIA, (502) 657-5990, cdrake@jrarchitects.com

de Leon & Primmer Architecture Workshop – Roberto de Leon, FAIA, (502) 582-6295, deleon@deleon-primmer.com

Omni Architects – Deb Cutts, (859) 252-6664, deb@omniarchitects.com

Luckett & Farley – Mark Thomas, AIA (502) 939-5969, mthomas@luckett-farley.com

Work Architecture + Design—Katie Butsch, AIA, (502) 32-3232, katie@wrkarc.com

Studio Kremer Architects – Scott Kremer, AIA, (502) 499-1100, scott@studiokremer.com

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KENTUCKY ARCHITECTS PRESENT 2026 AWARDS OF RECOGNITION

The Kentucky Society of The American Institute of Architects (AIA Kentucky) has presented seven (7) Special Awards of Recognition for outstanding service to AIA Kentucky or the profession of architecture in Kentucky. Awards presented and their recipients are:

C. Julian Oberwarth Gold Medal Award

To recognize and honor an individual Member who has displayed a long-standing commitment to the betterment of the profession and well-being of architects in Kentucky, and who has dedicated extraordinary time and talent to this end.

Presented to:

Mark Trier, FAIA
Retired (formerly JRA Architects)
Louisville, KY

Honorary Membership Award

To honor an individual not otherwise eligible for membership who, with unselfish energy and support, has made a significant contribution to forwarding the goals of AIA Kentucky.

Presented to:

Aaron Shultz, PE, LEED AP
CMTA, Inc.
Lexington, KY

(more)

Thomas E. Lett III Citizen Architect Award

To honor an individual architect who has consistently applied their talents, skills & expertise to advocate for and raise awareness of the broader purpose of architecture and the built environment in their communities.

Presented to:

Rebecca Leigh Cox, AIA
Tate Hill Jacobs Architects
Lexington, KY

Emerging Professional Award

To honor an individual Member for a specific contribution or for their dedication and service which has significantly furthered the purposes of AIA Kentucky.

Presented to:

Brittany Leneave Smoot, AIA
Omni Architects
Louisville, KY

Distinguished Service Award

To recognize and honor an individual member for a specific contribution or for their dedication and service which has significantly furthered the purposes of AIA Kentucky.

Presented to:

David Mayo, AIA
Studio Mayo
Louisville, KY

(more)

Distinguished Firm Award

To recognize a member firm which, through consistent design recognition, vision, mentoring, leadership, and standards of quality, has distinguished itself over the past decade through design and implementation of works of architecture that enhance the quality of our environment.

Presented to:

Rachel Worley, AIA
Three Dot Design
Prospect, KY

Allied Professional Award

To pay tribute to an individual directly involved in the A/E/C industry who has consistently endeavored to work harmoniously with architects and other allied professionals toward the implementation of creative and innovative design solutions.

Presented to:

Joseph D. Calvert, CSI, AHC SCIP
Calvert Independent Hardware Specifications, LLC
Vine Grove, KY

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS OF WINNERS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST.

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